

Testimony before the Appropriations Health Sub-Committee  
February 24, 2022  
Name, Title, Location

Good afternoon Senator Abrams, Representative Dillon, Senator Somers, Representative Kennedy and members of the Appropriations Health Sub-Committee. My name is Jennifer Sawyer and I am a clinical social worker working in the Newtown Middle School, School Based Health Center with Conor in Newtown, CT. My SBHC site offers medical and behavioral health services to 179 students at this school.

I am writing to you today to talk about the Governor's Department of Public Health budget specific to the School Based Health Center line item.

Every child deserves a chance to be healthy and to reach their full potential in life. But many children have health problems that make it difficult for them to learn and succeed. We all want young people in CT to be healthy and thriving. School based health centers help young people with their mental health problems, their physical health problems, and their oral health problems. To illustrate this with a real patient, I want to share the school based health center experience of my pt Conor.

Conor is a 12 year old female student who is interested in becoming trans male. For the purpose of this essay, clinician will refer to PT with male he/him pronouns. PT was referred to clinician by his guidance counselor for depression, tics, ADHD and questions about his gender identity. PT reported to clinician that he has asked his parents to refer to him as male. He was briefly in therapy in the past. The therapist that he was seeing recommended to Conor's parents that they continue to use female pronouns and PT's female birth name. PT reported that he was unhappy with this.

Two weeks ago, PT was asked during his health class, to complete an SOS questionnaire to assess his, and all other students level of suicidal ideation. He was determined to have 6 out of 7 responses that were suggestive of being at risk for suicidal vulnerability. Clinician was asked to psychologically evaluate PT for his level of suicidal risk. Clinician found PT to be depressed and to be experiencing suicidal ideation. PT denied active suicidal ideation. No plan was expressed by PT.

Clinician contacted PT's mother. Clinician recommended to mother that she use PT's chosen pronouns. A lengthy conversation took place during which mother reported to clinician that she had ambivalent feelings toward her child. She stated that she loves him very much, but is conflicted about his gender identity questions. A session was scheduled for parents and clinician to meet independently from PT. Support will be given to them to assist them in regard to their

feelings. Referral will be made for services that would successfully help them to interact with their child as kindly and appropriately as possible.

This morning PT met with clinician. He reported that his mother has been using male pronouns when speaking with him. This was described as a major source of relief to PT. PT explained to clinician that he has been feeling depressed for the past 3 months. He also has felt limited in energy.

I ask that you please give strong consideration to increasing funding to School Based Health Centers throughout the state so young people such as Conor can continue to thrive and remain in school. This is critical to their future. Thank you for supporting School Based Health Centers.